



TIP SHEET

Enhancing Social Interactions in Children with Autism

Children with autism often exhibit difficulty in interacting with peers or adults in their environment. Often it is difficult for them to read body language and social cues from others. Behaviors that enhance personal attachment such as eye contact, smiling, approaching, or reaching out for others may develop at a different rate, or may not generalize from parents to alternate caregivers. Development of attachment behaviors is limited or atypical. Sensory difficulties may make it difficult for the child to tolerate physical, visual, or auditory input and contact from others. Promoting positive interactions with peers and adults through attachment techniques may assist the child with autism in language and cognitive development as well.

Areas of concern in social development

- Preference for solitary play
- May prefer objects over people
- May not imitate modeled behaviors
- May not exhibit separation anxiety
- Lack of active dependency
- May use adults hand to perform tasks without regard for adult

Enhancing skills

To increase positive interaction between children with autism and others the child must develop an increase in attachment behaviors (such as eye contact and approaching), increase their ability to look to others for assistance, and increase their ability to engage in reciprocal play with others. The following are ideas to assist in development of interactive skills:

- Involve the child in turn taking activities that require shared space and materials. Provide structure and support to help the child remain engaged and wait his or her turn. Use familiar, short songs or counting activities in a predictable way.
- Encourage the child to join a peer who is using a favorite toy. Model and parallel talk appropriate ways for the child to join his peer (i.e. "First peer's turn, then child's turn", or engage the child in a two person activity like building a marble works tower together). Use pictures to identify the play sequence or incorporate "your turn" "my turn" cards.
- Observe child's cues for stress and over-stimulation. Help the child use coping strategies to remain involved in the interaction or reengage after a brief break.
- Incorporate motor component (i.e. rocking chair, ball, t-stool, or swing) to maintain interest and attention.
- Use sensory materials such as balloons and bubbles to increase eye contact, following, and vocalization with the adult.
- Engage the child in activities that are motivating for the child and involve proximity and contact with the adults (i.e. tickling, rocking on feet, gross motor activities).

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